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## Manual Scavenging Health Risks and Safety of

According to International Labor Organization data, 234,000 people die of occupational hazard every year. Among them, 321,000 deaths are caused by accident in the working place. Rest of the 17, 13000 are due to different health hazards caused by their profession. This fact portrays a gloomy inhuman picture of the working environment.

One of the worst victims of occupational risk and disease are the cleaners who are employed in traditional waste disposal. A group of Dalits use to manage and dispose human excrements by hand. After flush toilet came in to vogue in Europe traditional way of disposing human waste has come to an end. But this is yet in practice at India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

It is somewhat a rule that only the Dalits will work as the cleaner. As a result these people are sufferings as burdened by other due to their birth and occupation. These people keep the high births of the society clean and compelled to live as untouchable and unclean.

There are approximately 6.5 million Dalits and deprived people in Bangladesh. Half of their work forces are employed as cleaner in different city corporations and municipalities. According to a big number of people from Dalit community were migrated in present Bangladesh in 1620 AD from which is now India to dispose the bodies killed by the Burmese bandit. Presently they are living in the 27 colonies of Dhaka and Narayangonj and cleaning the every day urban wastes. They are also living in every city in the colonies specified for them.

Urban areas in Bangladesh have observed a considerable development in the sanitation system. There is good sewerage system available in most of the buildings. But this pace has slowed down in the rural area. Open toilet is can widely found there. These toilets are filled with waste after a certain time and local cleaners are called on to make them empty and usable again. Most of these cleaners are not employed by the municipality and are paid in daily basis. There are approximately 100 toilets at Ishwardi of Pabna district and Syedpur of Nilphamari district where cleaners use to dispose human excrement by hand. Dalit cleaners are managing every day waste disposal without any using any safety measure. This is extremely risky.



Whatever is done on occupational health safety in Bangladesh, has taken only the industrial workers in consideration. Health of manual scavengers is in greater threat due to their occupation but yet any research or initiatives on them are almost non-existent.

A recent research has shown that city corporations have distributed safety tools like mask, gloves, shoes and aprons to the cleaners working for them. But further supply was not available when earlier were worn out. Some of the cleaners have not even got the reach to the supply. They often suffer with long ailment due to diseases as they dispose and categorize waste on bare hands and feet. Most of the informants of the research (94%) have suffered in long term ailment (70% of them have suffered with fever accompanied with cold, 42% with back pain, 36% with stomach ache, 30% with gastrick and 20% with skin disease). Most of the rural sewerage line cleaners suffer with problem in breathing chords. Most of the rural human scavengers suffer with skin disease and problem in breathing chords. Pregnant cleaners are, no doubt, are living in utter health hazards.

Dalit cleaners' health situation is in grave danger as their knowledge and awareness is very limited about the health and health service providing organizations. Lack of proper initiatives by the government and non-government has made the scenario worst. Average income of a cleaner is monthly is approximately 4,170 taka and it is all to bear the expenses of a large family of 8-10 people. And they have to spend a large part of their meager income for medical treatment which is mostly purchasing low priced medicine from the nearby drug store without any doctors' consultation.

## Immediate tasks

1. Specific research should be conducted on the health hazards of the Dalit cleaners.
2. Arrange training of the cleaners on their occupational health hazards and distribution of necessary safety equipments
3. Establishing government health care centre in Dalit colonies to ensure quality medical treatment in low expense.
4. Proper implementation of government policy on maternity leave for the women cleaner
5. Formulate effective policy to abolish human scavenging along with creating alternative employment for them.

## References

- 1) A Study on Occupation Health & Safety of Dalit's in Bangladesh-2013, by Nagorik Uddyog & Safety and Rights Society.
- 2) Manual Scavenging: An Inhuman Occupation, by Zakir Hossain, Abul Basar & B.David Raju, Nagorik Uddyog.

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